DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 577 SP 014 359

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TITLE The Physical Educator as a Teacher-Counselor: A Systematic Process.
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counseling; *Counselor Attitudes; Counselor Characteristics; *Counselor Role; *Helping Relationship; Listening Skills; *Problem Solving; Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

While the physical education teacher or coach is rarely a trained counselor, occasion may arise when he or she may be called upon to assume that role in relationship with a student. In this guide counseling techniques are discussed for the use of the teacher who is not formally trained in them and a brief list of specific "do's" and "don'ts" is provided. (JD)

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THE PHYSICAL EDUCATOR AS A TEACHER-COUNSELOR: A SYSTEMATIC PROCESS

by

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SP 014 359

Counseling is inherent in effective physical education teaching. A teacher must be able to provide timely help and guidance to students as a function of assisting students to resolve personal problems and to help students perform up to capacity and to program standards.

This most difficult yet important task faces each of us in our teaching and/or our coaching situations. It is a difficult task because effective counseling involves effective communication. Moreover, counseling is important because, through the process, a student will become aware of whether or not we are really concerned about him/her as a person.

Meaningful counseling by the physical educator can do a great deal to engender a sense of loyalty, responsiveness and aid in personal adjustments of students. In contrast, an indifferent or closed attitude toward student problems may exacerbate small problems to the point that they endanger program and teaching effectiveness.

Does this mean that the physical educator is expected to be a professionally trained, competent psychotherapist? Certainly not, but we must be able to give assistance to students even if it involves nothing more than a referral to an appropriate professional agency and then insuring that the student receives prompt assistance. The school, although it is seen as a structured organization, is still composed of people, and people have problems.

Problems themselves may range from such concerns as general dissatisfaction with school to emotional, family or other adjustment difficulties. Further, many times problems will arise from the very

structure of the school itself. As an organization the school and/or the physical education department can foster impressions of impersonality in relations between teacher and student as well as feelings within the student that he/she is powerless to deal effectively with the organization. As a consequence, this student might: (1) see school and/or the gymnasium as a somewhat stressful place; (2) magnify personal problems unreasonably; (3) feel he/she cannot communicate; (4) close off formal communications.

Since the physical educator is primarily an agent of the organization, one might be inclined to conclude that there is a great potential for roll conflict when the teacher acts as a counselor. This certainly can be the case if the teacher approaches the matter of counseling from the common perception that it involves simply personal advice giving and does not imply a systematic process. Fortunately, effective counseling does not connote this type of interpersonal exchange. For the effective physical educator, counseling can be defined as: A systematic communication process that is designed to foster meaningful choices and promote adjustment that will result in the student's progressive development.

As a systematic process, counseling has certain characteristics which act to insure that potential roll conflicts will be meaningful and the process will be effective. First, the process of counseling is only undertaken with a specific objective in mind. The student has a concern and the physical educator works with him/her to provide a framework for the solution of the problem. Here, it is important for the teacher to remember throughout the counseling process that the

student must maintain responsibility for his own actions if the process is to be a success. Second the teacher must demonstrate a sincere interest in the student as he/she appears at the moment of counseling. According to Tyler (1969) the power of counseling lies in interpersonal relationships that are open, sincere and dependable. Third, the student is usually in a distressed state whereas the teacher is not. Therefore, the physical educator can act as a stabilizing influence. Fourth, the counseling enviornment is limited to promote development. All counseling sessions are structured to promote student movement toward the solution of personal difficulties. Moreover, discussion during the session is limited to the topic being discussed and is not allowed to degress to topics that are not related to the problem or to topics that do promote student adjustment. Fifth, insofar as the situation will allow, all matters discussed are treated in a confidential, non-evaluative fashion by the teacher. If the student is going to open with the teacher-counselor he/she must be able to trust him/her. Finally, and most importantly the physical educator employs a specific counseling approach. It is important that the physical educator adopt a counseling approach that is consistant with his/her teaching style. Failure to do this will raise the possibility that the teacher may be seen as being inconsistent by students.

While there are many specific counseling methods based on different schools of thought, all can be generally placed in one of three approaches - directive (counselor-centered), non-directive (student-centered) or eclectic. The major differences between these approaches lie in the techniques and philosophies about people rather than in

overall counseling objectives which are very similar. As a physical educator-counselor, it is most important that one begin with an approach that is most with which he/she is most comfortable. As one gains experience in counseling he/she will find that he/she tends to use the techniques of a variety of approaches and that the theoretical differences will become blurred.

The directive approach to counseling is a rational approach in which the counselor acts as a teacher and problems are solved in a "one-to-one" teaching environment. The term "directive" could be misunderstood, for the counselor does not direct a solution, assume an authoritarian, judgmental attitude, nor does he/she dictate actions which will lead to a solution. Rather, this approach presupposes considerable experience on the part of the counselor. This, in turn, allows the counselor to assume the roli of a person equipped to separate the relevant from the irrelevant and to offer courses of action leading to problem solutions. The counselor will leave the decisions to the student being counseled, but will be direct in his/her guidance, making it a short-cut or economical approach to problem-solving.

Directive counseling is the approach normally used in public schools. It is an effective technique even though it most often:

1. is concerned with immediate rather than long range problems.
2. is considered more problem centered than being concerned with the totality of the person.
3. concerns itself with changing specific aspects of a student's behavior such as social behavior, attitudes, and task behavior patterns.

In contrast to the directive approach to counseling, the non-directive or student-centered approach implies that the physical education counselor adopts the frame of the student. This approach appears to have surface simplicity about it. However, unlike the directive approach to counseling, the student-centered approach sees the student as an important agent in the change process. The basic objective is change or growth in the student. The teacher is a vital instrument in the process of change, not as an intellectual resource, but as a human being who can fully be the kind of person he/she really is and can accept the student for what he/she is. This approach assumes that only the student can really deal with his/her problem and any change must come from within, not from any kind of direction or guidance from an external source. The basic hypothesis of the non-directive approach is, therefore, that every student has the capacity to understand himself/herself, determine the source of a problem, and recognize himself/herself in a direction that will be ultimately adjestive. Using this approach, the physical educator-counselor's task is to:

1. establish an atmosphere and a relationship with the student so that the student may begin to understand and reorganize himself/herself;
2. totally accept the student, including behavior and values.
3. refrain from guiding, directing or advising the student.
4. act to clarify the student's feelings, empathize with the stutent, and establish a relationship of acceptance and confidence.

The task of the non-directive counselor is not an easy one. There is the danger that the beginning teacher-counselor will interpret the

student-centered approach as meaning that he or she must establish a friendship relationship with the student, thereby creating roll conflict and defeating the purpose of counseling. Further, it is a time-consuming operation. The teacher-counselor must not only be able to see the world through the eyes of the student, but must be able to accept his/her feelings and behavior without value judgment. A non-directive counselor does provide information to the student if the student desires this information in order to make a choice.

The eclectic approach to counseling is one in which the physical educator-counselor does not adhere to any single theoretical approach. Rather, he/she focuses on a given student's problems and then selects an approach or combination of approaches that he/she feels will lead to the best solution. The teacher may find it advantageous to use a directive approach in one case and a non-directive approach in another. This should not be confused with trial and error counseling. A real eclectic counselor merely strives to select what he/she finds best in the various approaches and then applies them based upon experience.

What should the physical educator look for when trying to determine which of the three approaches to use? Generally the characteristics of the particular school setting will guide in your search. Here, such variables as the time available, relationship with the student being counseled, setting of the interview, and the teacher's personality and desires will govern the choice. There is one other variable, however, that is also important: the degree of discomfort felt by the student as he/she approaches his or her problem-- is the student being emotional or rational? When the student is rational and logical in thinking, the teacher-counselor is able to be more directive

since the student is able to accept the teacher's guidance and make a rational choice. In contrast, when the student is approaching his/her problem emotionally, a non-directive approach is indicated. This affords the student the opportunity to talk out feelings to a point where he/she can assume a more rational stance.

While the counseling process has been defined, the characteristics of the process explained, and the general approaches to counseling discussed, the matter of characteristics of the physical educator-counselor have been omitted to this point so they might be addressed as a separate vital topic. Primarily, the teacher must be a good communicator to be a successful counselor and he/she must avoid entering counseling with preconceived ideas about what will transpire. Further he/she must communicate three essential qualities about himself/herself to the student. First, he/she must demonstrate and communicate acceptance of the student. This involves personal willingness on the part of the teacher to allow students to differ from one another and a realization that the ongoing experience of each student is a complex pattern of striving, thinking, and feeling. Second, the teacher must communicate understanding to the student. Finally, the teacher must communicate a sense of sincerity to the student.

In conclusion, there are some do's and don'ts that can be helpful to the physical educator-counselor:

Don't

1. Go beyond your capability as a counselor---when in doubt refer the student to an expert.
2. Jump to conclusions.

3. Set preconditions on the student for counseling.
4. Get sidetracked into expressions of opinions about behavior, school policy, discipline, etc.
5. Use emotionally loaded words.
6. Talk about similar student problems.
7. Remove the decision-making process from the student's hands.
8. Talk about student problems outside the counseling enviornment.
9. Use jargon.

Do

1. Know what resources are available to assist you in the counseling process.
2. Understand your position and limit the counseling process to promote growth.
3. Prepare for your counseling sessions.
4. Facilitate verbalization, feeling, and development of the problem by the student.
5. Use the student's side of an issue under discussion rather than someone else's position.
6. Be able to handle periods of silence.
7. Listen for themes in the student's discussion.
8. Be a good listener and be responsive to the student.
9. Think before replying to the student's comments.